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ABSTRACT

Special education classes for significantly subaverage students, sometimes called the "handicapped," have proved, through scientific inquiry, to be no more successful and much more costly than regular classes. This has resulted in the de-emphasis of some unsuccessful programs, such as institutionalization and self-contained segregated classrooms. Social change in the development of alternate approaches to education of the handicapped ought to be the result of scientific inquiry. All advocated changes ought to be subjected to ongoing research. Especially helpful in evaluating educational/vocational progress are task-referenced, criterion-referenced tests which refer to specific materials for offsetting assayed weaknesses. Behavior evaluation should be included and should be followed up with behavior modification. Pre-service and in-service teacher education have great potential in the development, maintenance, and enhancement of good programs. Rigorous models, rigorous applications, and rigorous evaluations are needed. Through continuing experimental attitudes and efforts, better models will become available. (JDD)

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Social Change and Special Education

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Abstract

Social change may imply individual change; individual change may imply social change. Irrespective of the referent or of the direction, change ought to be the result of scientific inquiry. The care of the significantly subaverage has a long history, much of which is negative. The application of research findings has resulted in the de-emphasis of some unsuccessful programs (e.g., institutionalization; self-contained segregated classroom). However, much more definitive research is required since there are many teaching/learning models. Education is in need of marked change. All education ought to be special. The best integrant of education is special education, and the best integrant of special education is education.

Social Change and Special Education

All education, each education, should be special. Social change ought to approach that target. In our society, the phrase "special education" refers specifically to education of the significantly subaverage. As keywords, one may denote "corrective" education for the subaverage and "remedial" education for the significantly subaverage.

The most difficulty in teaching and the most difficulty in learning (as general statements) relate to the significantly subaverage, at times called, the "handicapped." It is in that milieu of teaching-learning that we ought to be truly special. We need and ought to want special teachers, special curricula, special methods, special materials, special structures, and special functions.

Social change ought to foment the best in teachers and the best in learners. However, the history of special education has been checkered. How have special education individuals been treated over the centuries (Hewett, 1984, Chap. 1)? In ancient times, infants or children who seemed significantly subaverage were killed or abandoned. In modern times, we have been more humane: we ignored them; or relegated them to institutions which were not special in a positive sense; or "allowed" them in community schools if they were toilet trained, ambulatory, and docile. In the community schools, those children and adolescents were either in regular classes, or in self-contained classes (which became popular in the U.S. in the 1960s). The latter were promoted to give special education. None of the techniques proved fruitful in guaranteeing the rights of special youths to an education (Stearns, 1973). As an aside, when we read

history, we do not trust renditions that do not mention transgressions.

Why did the self-contained special education classes develop in the U.S. in the 1960s? Because of pressure from special interest parent groups (local, state, national), federal legislation (see reference P.L. 88-164), and some professional organizations. What happened in those special education classes? How did it happen? (What and how are the essential questions of science.) The self-contained classrooms were not special. One example of a violation was in the area of materials. Were special materials used? Decidedly not. A common technique in obtaining materials was to scavenge used books (in good condition) that were being replaced in various grades. Nonetheless, the youths because of many caring teachers were busy and happy, but is that enough? Education is the most important goal for all children and adolescents. Vocation is the most important goal for all adolescents and adults.

When the data were cumulated, it became obvious to researchers, that special education classes had failed, that is, they proved no more successful and were much more costly than regular classes. Also, if there were no special education classes in junior high school, education ceased for those segregated youths in elementary school; if there were no special education classes in high school, education ceased for those segregated youths in junior high school. Therefore, the prospects for continuing in school were diminished for segregated special education students. A paradox, those needing the most education and training were given the least. Subsequently, in the 1970s in the U.S., there was a trend toward "mainstreaming"

(Forness, 1972), that is, educating most children in regular classes. That trend is continuing, though not without problems (Sabornie, 1985).

Social change, under the rubric of public statutes and legislation, ought to depend upon scientific investigations, not the vagaries of politicians and administrators, not the vagaries of bureaucracy (Blau, 1956). Education, not specifically mentioned in the U.S. Constitution, is entrusted to "the States respectively, or to the people" (Amendment X of the original ratified ten, Bill of Rights); allegedly, the federal government is allowed to interfere, only, to right a wrong or to fulfill a dire need not addressed by the states. One such wrong which resulted in Linda Brown versus the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, in 1954, gave impetus to much federal legislation (tangentially for the handicapped). "Separate but equal" was not considered viable in the context of Black versus White education, nor in its extension to handicapped versus non-handicapped education (see P.L. 94-142; see OSERS News in Print). The latter public law mandated the education of each child, in the "least restrictive environment." Ipso facto, are we to assume that placing a special education student in a regular classroom automatically solves the problem? No! Generally, regular class placement would be preferable to institutionalization or to an exclusive home-bound status. But, there are many models to be studied for efficacy (e.g., Allen, 1984; Gerry, 1985; Gillet, 1982; Sargent, 1984). Hewett's (1984) original engineered classroom, now called PAI (Preacademic I) is an excellent example of a resource room (one model).

Let us concern ourselves with "what" and "how," as they relate potential into actual, aspiration into reality. The "specials" are

needed, not just the simple expedient of mainstreaming (Biklen, 1985). Remember, the aforementioned research results were general (not universal) and implied no significant differences, not that regular classes were superior to special education classes. In truth, as a generalization, both settings did poorly in meeting the learning and career goals so necessary in our society and culture (Brolin, 1983). Year after year, remedial education and corrective education students fell and fall further and further behind their peers. Are we really better off (Greenburg, 1984)? Consult the data and research in the redoubtable ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center), both CIJE (Current Index to Journals in Education) and RIE (Resources in Education) at many college or university libraries.

Evaluations are needed to monitor educational/vocational progress (or lack of progress). Science is assessment/prediction through controls to criteria. Test evaluation can be helpful (Mitchell, 1985), and many tests may be developed or administered by the teacher (Compton, 1984; Zigmond et al., 1983). Especially helpful and strongly recommended are the task-referenced, criterion-referenced tests (Salvia & Ysseldyke, 1985; Taylor, 1984) which refer to specific materials (cited by page number) for offsetting assayed weaknesses. (N.B.: Evaluation ought to be a means to an end, not an end in itself.)

Behavior evaluation is of great important if included in a behavior modification program. Behavior modification always includes behavior evaluation, but behavior evaluation, unfortunately, may not include behavior modification. The latter ought to focus on the Skinnerian preference for positive reinforcement. The fourth "r"

(added to reading, writing, and arithmetic) is reinforcement. Many materials incorporate this powerful conditioning method. Consider programmed instruction, teaching machines, computer-assisted instruction, etc. (ERIC, especially the Clearinghouse on Information Resources; Hall, 1984; Hendershot, 1986; Pedrini & Pedrini, 1973; Skinner, 1984). As an aside, school psychologists and reading specialists spend an inordinate amount of time labeling rather than treating. Teachers deserve more help.

Eventually, the successes or failures of special education depend upon the "specials" mentioned previously. Stated another way, the results, positive or negative, depend upon teacher attitudes/abilities and teacher support services. Pre-service (Bardon et al., 1984; Koehler, 1985) and in-service (Templeman et al., 1983; Ward, 1984) training and education have great potential for developing, maintaining, and enhancing good programs. Especially, if they are data-oriented rather than flummery-oriented. In order to bring about positive social change, aspiring teachers and teachers need help in understanding, appreciating, and <u>using</u> techniques related to research results, media centers, resource rooms, learning centers, English laboratories, mathematics laboratories, libraries, etc. In order to accomplish this, first and foremost, changes need to be effected in teacher education (Pedrini & Pedrini, 1980). Colleges of teacher education in their usual curricula (methods, materials, etc.) ought to focus on the subaverage and supra-average, the approximately 50% whose needs are not well met by the class milieu. This is how you begin to develop a special teacher--ideationally, emotionally, valuationally, and behaviorally. Then, supported by the pre-service and in-service

experiences with research results, media centers, resource rooms, etc., small group or individual attention to students will be effected. To enhance learning in school, desegregation (for minorities or handicapped) is important (Dreger, 1985), though perhaps not as important as small group or individual attention at school and educational support and stimulation at home (Walberg, 1985). The latter problem/solution is not addressed herein. What about the average (as contrasted with the subaverage or supra-average)? Their needs may readily be met by the usual curricula, methods, materials, etc.

All advocated changes ought to be subjected to ongoing research. Today's sense may be tomorrow's nonsense, and vice versa. Consequently, one should be aware but not slavishly influenced by publications which may be unscientific, be fadish, or bespeak a "repetition compulsion" (remember Sigmund Freud's use of the phrase). The status quo in special education is definitely no panacea (Pedrini & Pedrini, 1977). More creativity in teaching/learning ought to be investigated/implemented (Pedrini & Pedrini, 1988).

Teachers, as many other practitioners, often do not have a scientific attitude. Their teaching/learning guides are descriptive, unproved, anecdotal, etc., rather than rigorous. Why is so little scientific research done in many applied fields (not just teaching, but psychotherapy, as one other example)? Because the baleful eye of research can prove you wrong. It is much simpler to assume that you are right. If you do no research, you cannot expose yourself to failure, if you do research, you can (Pedrini & Pedrini, 1979). We need rigorous models, rigorous applications, and rigorous evaluations (NCETE, 1985).

If a model does not work well for a significant majority of the specified group, modify the model. Through continuing experimental attitudes and efforts, better models will become available. Social change ought to be the result of scientific inquiry. If teaching (in education and special education) follows that dictum, then it will surely live up to its promise as the noblest profession.

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